

(Terms as discussed by Dr. Viorel Achim)

Slaves are just one category of people falling into the more general category of bondage—i.e. under the control of another person. For the past century many other categories of population were bounded to a master. The most important was that of the bounded peasants or serfs. The serfdom was the term which defines the social condition of the largest part of the population of Europe, since the fall of the Roman Empire until the early modern time. In Eastern Europe, serfdom survived until mid-19th century. The situation in Romania was not different. The corvee-peasants (in Romanian "clacasi") from 1830s-1860s (the time of the emancipation of Gypsies) were bounded to the boyars through a series of obligations.

The issue of interest for people dealing with the history of the Gypsies in Romania may be the difference between the Gypsies (slaves) and the peasants (serfs), actually the difference between slavery and serfdom. Both categories - the slaves (Gypsies) and the serfs (in the 19th century, corvee-peasants) - had no personal freedom. What defines the social condition of the slaves/Gypsies is the fact that they had no status of legal persons. The slave was fully the property of his master, figuring among his personal property. The master could do as he pleased with the slave: he could put him to work, he could sell him or exchange him for some other good, he could use him as payment for a debt or he could mortgage or bequeath him. The possessions of the slave were also at the discretion of the master. The situation of the peasants was better.

This issue is not simple, because during the centuries the legal and social condition of the peasants underwent changes, but slavery remained the same institution, unchangeable, until the emancipation.